Barthian
Dietrich
Bombecks?

GIVE IT ALL

APRIL 14, 1996
MONTREAT STEWARDSHIP CONFERENCE
JOHN M. BUCHANAN, PASTOR
FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO
SCRIPTURE
ROMANS 12:9-21
MARK 10:17-27

"...GO, SELL WHAT YOU OWN, AND GIVE THE MONEY TO THE POOR... THEN COME, FOLLOW ME." -MARK 10:21 (NRSV)

SOMEONE ONCE ASKED ERMA BOMBECK IF SHE SAVED UP GOOD IDEAS SO SHE'D BE ABLE TO WRITE AT LEAST ONE STRONG COLUMN PER WEEK.

SHE ANSWERED IN A COLUMN, "WHAT'S SAVED IS OFTEN LOST," ~~WHICH, UNLIKELY AS IT IS, I PROPOSE AS A SECONDARY TEXT THIS MORNING.~~ Sermon

MISS BOMBECK WROTE:

"I DON'T SAVE ANYTHING, MY POCKETS ARE EMPTY AT THE END OF A WEEK. SO IS MY GAS TANK. SO IS MY FILE OF IDEAS. I TROT OUT THE BEST I'VE GOT, AND COME THE NEXT WEEK, I BARGAIN, WHIMPER, MAKE PROMISES, COWER AND THROW MYSELF ON THE MERCY OF THE ALMIGHTY FOR JUST THREE MORE COLUMNS IN EXCHANGE FOR CLEANING MY OVEN.

"I DIDN'T GET TO THIS POINT OVERNIGHT. I CAM FROM A FAMILY OF SAVERS WHO WERE SIRED BY POVERTY AND ... WORSHIPED AT THE ALTER OF SELF-DENIAL.

"THROUGHOUT THE YEARS, I'VE SEEN A FAIR NUMBER OF MY FAMILY WHO HAVE DIED LEAVING CANDLES THAT HAVE NEVER BEEN

LIT, APPLIANCES THAT NEVER GOT OUT OF THE BOX ...

"IT GETS TO BE A HABIT.

"I HAVE LEARNED THAT SILVERWARE TARNISHES WHEN IT ISN'T USED, PERFUME TURNS TO ALCOHOL, CANDLES MELT IN THE ATTIC OVER THE SUMMER, AND IDEAS THAT ARE SAVED FOR A DRY WEEK OFTEN BECOME DATED.

"I ALWAYS HAD A DREAM THAT WHEN I AM ASKED TO GIVE AN ACCOUNTING OF MY LIFE TO A HIGHER COURT, IT WILL BE LIKE THIS: 'SO, EMPTY YOUR POCKETS. WHAT HAVE YOU GOT LEFT OF YOUR LIFE? ANY DREAMS THAT WERE UNFILLED? ANY UNUSED TALENT THAT WE GAVE YOU WHEN YOU WERE BORN THAT YOU STILL HAVE LEFT? ANY

UNSAID COMPLIMENTS OR BITS OF LOVE THAT YOU HAVEN'T SPREAD AROUND?'

AND, I WILL ANSWER, 'I'VE NOTHING TO RETURN. I SPENT EVERYTHING YOU GAVE ME. I'M AS NAKED AS THE DAY I WAS BORN.'"

ONE TIME A YOUNG MAN ASKED JESUS A SIMILAR QUESTION. WHAT A MOMENT WHEN A WEALTHY YOUNG MAN RUNS UP TO JESUS, A POOR, ITINERATE RABBI, KNEELS BEFORE HIM AND ASKS, "GOOD TEACHER, WHAT MUST I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?" WHAT FOLLOWS IS INTRIGUING: "OBEY THE LAW," JESUS SAYS; "KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS."

"I DO THAT," THE YOUNG MAN ANSWERS. "I'VE BEEN KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS ALL MY LIFE AND I'M STILL EMPTY."

JESUS LIKES THAT. THIS MAN'S WHOLESOME INNOCENCE, HONEST INQUISITIVENESS, COURAGEOUS VULNERABILITY, MAKE HIM A VERY WINSOME CHARACTER. HE HAS ALL THE PROMISE OF A TRULY GREAT ONE. EVEN HIS RELIGION ASSURES HIM: HIS WEALTH IS EVIDENCE OF GOD'S BLESSING. SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM? WHY DOESN'T HE FEEL GOOD ABOUT HIMSELF? JESUS LOOKS AT HIM AGAIN, LOVES HIM AND SAYS, "YOU LACK ONE THING. GO, SELL WHAT YOU OWN, GIVE THE MONEY TO THE POOR, COME FOLLOW ME."

JESUS DOESN'T SAY THAT TO EVERYBODY, BY THE WAY. IT IS HIS PRESCRIPTION FOR A PARTICULAR YOUNG MAN WHO, WHEN HE HEARS IT, IS SAD, THE EXT

SAYS. APPALLED IS MORE LIKE IT, DON'T YOU IMAGINE? SELL IT ALL -- GIVE IT ALL? WHO COULD DO A THING LIKE THAT? MAYBE SOME OF IT; MAYBE MAKE A MAJOR, LEADERSHIP GIFT TO THE CAMPAIGN; MAYBE EVEN TITHE TEN PERCENT OF THE INCOME FROM HIS INVESTMENTS, AFTER TAXES, OF COURSE. BUT SELL IT ALL? GIVE IT ALL? NO WAY.

BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR SAYS CHRISTIANS MANGLE THIS TEXT IN ONE OF TWO WAYS: BY DENYING THAT IT IS ABOUT MONEY AND BY THINKING IT IS ONLY ABOUT MONEY.

JESUS, BY THE WAY, HAS A LOT TO SAY ABOUT THE TOPIC. SOMEONE OBSERVED THAT

The issue -
is Stewardship about Money
Life - Faith - D. J. Hall

if money. too easy
no stew. of life
but - if life -
no money -
what preacher
doesn't know
that dynamic
re. love -
love all - not
particular

HE TALKS MORE ABOUT MONEY THAN HE DOES ABOUT HEAVEN.

THIS IS, FIRST OF ALL, ABOUT MONEY, A TOPIC ABOUT WHICH AMERICANS, AND AMERICAN CHRISTIANS PARTICULARLY, HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF AMBIGUITY. TWO RECENT BOOKS EXPLORE THE TOPIC. JACOB NEEDLEMAN IS A PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY AT SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY AND HE HAS WRITTEN A BOOK ENTITLED MONEY AND THE MEANING OF LIFE WHICH HAS RECEIVED NATIONAL ATTENTION. HE WRITES:

"IN NO OTHER CULTURE OR CIVILIZATION THAT WE KNOW OF HAS MONEY BEEN SUCH A PERVASIVE AND DECISIVE INFLUENCE. IN THE WORLD WE NOW LIVE IN, MONEY ENTERS INTO EVERYTHING HUMAN

BEINGS DO, INTO EVERY ASPECT AND POCKET OF LIFE. THIS IS SOMETHING NEW." [P. 2]

AND I THOUGHT OF THE UNFORTUNATE PLACE WE HAVE COME TO POLITICALLY: THAT THE PREREQUISITE FOR MOUNTING A SUCCESSFUL POLITICAL CAMPAIGN IS THE ABILITY TO RAISE AND SPEND AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF MONEY: YOUR OWN IF YOU HAVE IT, OR CONTRIBUTORS OR "POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES," WHO BELIEVE IN YOU -- AND WHO EXPECT THAT YOU WILL REMEMBER THEIR INTERESTS WHEN YOU WIN AND TAKE OFFICE. AND WHO CAN THEREFORE THREATEN TO WITHHOLD DESPERATELY NEEDED MONEY FOR THE NEXT ELECTIONS, OR WORSE, GIVE IT TO YOUR OPPONENT, IF YOU STEP OUT OF LINE. IT IS THE LIFE-BLOOD OF THE ELECTORAL

PROCESS -- ~~MONEY -- AND WE STILL HAVE~~

~~THE NERVE TO CALL IT DEMOCRACY~~. I

THOUGHT ABOUT HOW MONEY DICTATES

DECISIONS: IN PRESERVING HARD MINERAL

MINING RIGHTS FOR WESTERN CORPORATIONS,

AND THE GUN LOBBY IN TEXAS, AND THE

FABULOUSLY WEALTHY CHRISTIAN COALITION

IN ~~VIRGINIA AND HARRY AND LOUIS~~ ON

~~HEALTH CARE REFORM~~ AND THE ELOQUENT FACT

THAT CAMPAIGN REFORM PROMISED,

DISCUSSED, DEBATED, WAS AT THE VERY LAST

MINUTE FILIBUSTERED TO DEATH. NEEDLEMAN

IS DEAD RIGHT. NOWHERE ELSE IN THE

WORLD -- OR IN HISTORY -- DOES MONEY

HAVE THAT KIND OF INFLUENCE.

"WE LIVE IN AN AFFLUENT SOCIETY" HE

SAYS. "THIS MEANS NOT ONLY THAT WE HAVE

Just published
Legions in lobbying
- Philip Morris
- AMA
- GM.
- Christian Coalition

MUCH MATERIAL WEALTH, BUT THAT WE WANT THIS WEALTH MORE THAN WE WANT EVERYTHING ELSE." [P. 22]

BUT, SAYS THIS PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY, IT DOESN'T DO FOR US WHAT WE WANT. IT DOESN'T MAKE US HAPPY OR FREE OR IMMORTAL OR EVEN CONTENT. IN FACT, HE PROPOSES THAT OUR DESIRE FOR MONEY IS A KIND OF SELF-IMPOSED HELL. IN A CHAPTER ENTITLED, "THE NEW POVERTY: LIFE IN HELL," HE WRITES

"HELL IS THE STATE IN WHICH WE ARE BARRED FROM RECEIVING WHAT WE TRULY NEED BECAUSE OF THE VALUE WE GIVE TO WHAT WE MERELY WANT." [P. 27]

ROBERT WUTHNOW, A PRINCETON SOCIOLOGIST, AGREES. WUTHNOW HAS BECOME

AN EXPERT ON THE TOPIC OF HOW AMERICANS, INCLUDING AMERICAN CHURCH PEOPLE, EXPRESS THEIR VALUES BY THEIR USE OF THEIR MONEY. IN HIS ~~RECENT~~ BOOK, GOD AND MAMMON IN AMERICA, HE OBSERVES THAT WE ARE A DEEPLY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE.

"BUT WE ARE ALSO PASSIONATELY COMMITTED TO THE ALMIGHTY DOLLAR. WE DEVOTE THE BULK OF OUR WAKING HOURS TO EARNING IT AND MUCH OF THE REST OF OUR TIME FINDING WAYS TO SPEND IT."

"SELL IT ALL. GIVE IT ALL." IT'S A KIND OF ULTIMATE COUNTER CULTURE MANDATE, IS IT NOT? WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE ALL DID IT? WHAT ABOUT OUR OBLIGATIONS, OUR BILLS, OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR FAMILIES AND

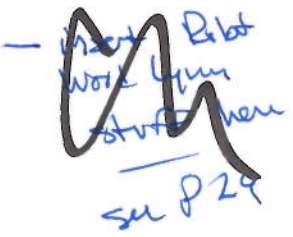
X insert RWL

COMMUNITIES AND COLLEGES AND MUSEUMS? DOES JESUS ACTUALLY PROPOSE THAT WE EXERCISE NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR FUTURE? FAMILIES? INSTITUTIONS? OR IS THIS JESUS' PRESCRIPTION FOR THIS YOUNG MAN ALONE? WHAT WOULD HIS PRESCRIPTION BE FOR YOU AND ME? WHAT WOULD HE TELL YOU AND ME THAT WE NEED TO DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE OR TO BE FULLY AND COMPLETELY ALIVE NOW? WOULD IT NOT BE DIFFERENT FOR EACH OF US? WOULD HE NOT, WITH HIS MYSTERIOUS PRECISION, HIS SENSE OF THE CENTER, WOULD HE NOT IDENTIFY WHATEVER IT IS IN WHICH YOU AND I HAVE INVESTED OUR HOPES AND DREAMS, AND ARE COUNTING ON TO SAVE US; OUR CAREER, OUR SUCCESS, OUR INFLUENCE, OUR POWER, OUR

PERSONAL APPEARANCE? WOULD HE NOT TELL US WHAT HE TOLD THAT WINSOME YOUNG MAN, NAMELY TO RELEASE OUR GRIP, TO OPEN OUR HANDS TO LET IT GO AND TO COME, FOLLOW.

ROBERT WUTHNOW SCOLDS THE MAINLINE CHRISTIAN CHURCH FOR NOT WRESTLING WITH THIS ISSUE. WUTHNOW SAYS AMERICANS ARE ASKING BASIC QUESTIONS OF MEANING AND PURPOSE, PERHAPS AS NEVER BEFORE. AND HE THINKS THE CHURCHES ARE FAILING THEM PRECISELY BECAUSE OF AMBIGUITY AND LACK OF NERVE. JESUS DIDN'T ASK FOR A MODEST CONTRIBUTION TO THE CAUSE: HE APPARENTLY WANTED THIS MAN'S HEART AND SOUL. IT'S A LONG WAY, WUTHNOW CRACKS, BETWEEN THE KIND OF PATHETIC PLEADING THAT GOES ON IN CHURCHES OVER A

PERCENTAGE POINT INCREASE IN PLEDGE COMMITMENTS AND JESUS' INVITATION TO TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW.



WE ARE CAUGHT IN THIS DILEMMA. WE ARE NOT A TIGHT BAND OF TWELVE OR TWENTY DEEPLY COMMITTED PERSONS. WE ARE A PUBLIC CHURCH IN A "CULTURE OF DISBELIEF: AND WE ARE THEOLOGICALLY DIVERSE AND WE ATTEMPT TO BE HOME FOR THE PASSIONATELY DEVOTED, THE MILDLY INTERESTED, THE CURIOUS, THE SEEKER. AND IT WOULD BE WRONG, I THINK, TO RESPOND TO THE PERSON ASKING, PERHAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME, ABOUT GOD AND THE MEANING OF LIFE, BY SUGGESTING THAT HE START THE PROCESS BY MAKING A GENEROUS FINANCIAL PLEDGE. AND YET, IS NOT PART

Part 1

OF THE CRISIS OF RELIGION IN OUR CULTURE PRECISELY OUR AMBIGUITY ABOUT THIS MATTER OF SACRIFICE AND COMMITMENT; OUR INCLINATION TO PRESENT THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST AS A SET OF OPINIONS, NOT MUCH DIFFERENT FROM OTHER OPINIONS, A PERSPECTIVE FOR CONSIDERATION, AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH AS A SET OF MODESTLY HELPFUL ACTIVITIES, RATHER THAN A FAITHFUL REPRESENTATION OF ONE WHO SAID -- SELL IT ALL -- GIVE IT ALL?

THE RESULT OF OUR AMBIGUITY IS SOMETHING CALLED "CONSUMER RELIGION," RELIGION DESIGNED WITH THE CUSTOMER IN MIND. FIRST YOU STUDY THE TARGET MARKET, DESIGN A PRODUCT TO MEET WHAT YOUR MARKET HAS SAID IT WANTS AND WILL

PAY FOR, AND THEN PROGRAM IT: BOUTIQUE RELIGION, SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE, WITH CHILD CARE FOR ALL, AND PLENTY OF PARKING -- AT LEAST THAT'S NOT A TEMPTATION -- OR EVEN A REMOTE POSSIBILITY FOR US!

"WHAT WE HAVE IN THIS CULTURE," SAYS TOM LONG OF PRINCETON, "IS A KIND O BLAND RELIGIOUS LIBERALISM, LONG ON TOLERANCE, SHORT ON LOYALTY, CHANNEL SURFING ACROSS THE RELIGIOUS SPECTRUM OF THE UNITED STATES, SELECTING THOSE OPTIONS THAT MATCH THEIR LIFE-STYLES AND MEET THEIR PERSONAL WANTS." [THEOLOGY TODAY, JULY ''94, P. 199]

THE WEALTHY YOUNG MAN WHO CAME TO JESUS ASKING ABOUT LIFE, IN A WAY, I

THINK REPRESENTS EVERYONE OF US. HE HAS SUCCEEDED PROFESSIONALLY, FINANCIALLY. IN ADDITION, HE HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL RELIGIOUSLY. HE HAS DONE EVERYTHING HIS RELIGION TOLD HIM TO DO ALL HIS LIFE. HE IS AT THE END OF THE LINE ... HE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO TO PRODUCE THE EXPERIENCE HE WANTS AND NEEDS. AND WHAT IS THAT? -- SATISFACTION, WHOLENESS, ONENESS WITH THE WORLD, WITH HIS OWN LIFE, WITH GOD, A SENSE THAT HE'S LIVING HIS LIFE AS PURPOSEFULLY AND MEANINGFULLY AS HE CAN ...

THE RADICAL MESSAGE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH IS THAT WHAT WE TRULY NEED IS OFFERED TO US AS A GIFT ... GOD'S LOVE, GOD'S FORGIVENESS, GOD'S ACCEPTANCE.

THE RADICAL PERSONAL IMPLICATION, OF COURSE, IS THAT YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO ACCEPT THE GIFT IN ORDER TO RECEIVE IT. I LOVE THE WAY BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR PUTS IT:

"YOU CANNOT ACCEPT GOD'S GIFT IF YOU HAVE NO SPARE HAND TO TAKE IT WITH. YOU CANNOT MAKE ROOM FOR IT IF YOUR ROOMS ARE ALREADY FULL. YOU CANNOT FOLLOW IF YOU ARE NOT FREE TO GO." [OP. CIT., P. 125]

AND SO, WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF A VERY DIFFERENT WAY OF LIVING LIFE AND RELATING TO OUR RESOURCES. WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A WHOLE NEW WAY OF LIVING WHICH IS INTENTIONALLY UNATTACHED TO ALL THE THINGS THE CULTURE

SAYS WE ABSOLUTELY MUST HAVE IN ORDER TO LIVE.

DO YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF WITHHOLDING ... WITHHOLDING YOUR LOVE, FOR INSTANCE, AND THEN LATER REGRETTING THAT YOU DIDN'T EXPRESS IT? DID YOU EVER FAIL TO GIVE A GIFT BECAUSE OF FRUGALITY AND THEN REGRETTED IT? DID YOU EVER NOT GIVE YOURSELF TOTALLY TO SOMEONE OR SOMETHING AND LATER WISHED YOU HAD?

I CONFESS -- I'M A SAVER ... I STILL HAVE MY CLASS NOTES FROM FRESHMAN GEOLOGY. A DOMESTIC CRISIS OCCURRED ONCE WHEN SOMEONE DISCARDED MY NINTH-GRADE LEAF NOTEBOOK ... SOMETIMES IN THE PROCESS OF PREPARING A SERMON, I

HAVE A COUPLE OF IDEAS WHICH I THINK ARE SO GOOD I CAN'T WASTE THEM IN AUGUST WHEN THEY MIGHT WORK IN NOVEMBER. AND THEN I READ ANNIE DILLARD'S WONDERFUL LITTLE BOOK, THE WRITING LIFE, WHICH IS REALLY ABOUT LIVING LIFE. ANNIE DILLARD'S WORDS LEAPT OFF THE PAGE AND I HAVE COME TO THINK THAT THEY ARE PERHAPS THE MOST ELOQUENT COMMENTARY AROUND ON THE STORY OF THE WEALTHY YOUNG MAN IN MARK 10.

"ONE OF THE FEW THINGS I KNOW ABOUT WRITING IS THIS: SPEND IT ALL, SHOOT IT, PLAY IT, LOSE IT, ALL, RIGHT AWAY, EVERY TIME. DO NOT HOARD WHAT SEEMS GOOD FOR A LATER TIME IN THE BOOK, OR FOR ANOTHER BOOK: GIVE IT, GIVE IT ALL,

GIVE IT NOW. THE IMPULSE TO SAVE SOMETHING GOOD FOR A BETTER PLACE LATER IS THE SIGNAL TO SPEND IT ALL. SOMETHING MORE WILL ARISE FOR LATER, SOMETHING BETTER. THESE THINGS FILL FROM BEHIND, FROM BENEATH, LIKE WELL WATER. SIMILARLY, THE IMPULSE TO KEEP TO YOURSELF WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED IS NOT ONLY SHAMEFUL, IT IS DESTRUCTIVE. J ANYTHING YOU DO NOT GIVE FREELY AND ABUNDANTLY BECOMES LOST TO YOU. YOU OPEN YOUR SAFE AND FIND ASHES." [P.78, 79]

THIS IS NOT AN EASY LESSON FOR MANY OF US. IF YOU ARE ON THE SHORT SIDE OF FORTY-FIVE, YOUR LIFE SCRIPT IS "EARN, CONSUME, DISCARD, EARN." IF YOU ARE ON

THE FAR SIDE OF FORTY-FIVE OR FIFTY, YOU WERE FORMED BY A DIFFERENT ETHOS, BY THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION, AND AT LEAST ONE OF YOUR LIFE SCRIPTS IS "EARN, SAVE, HOARD, SAVE," BECAUSE YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN. YOU MAY EVEN HAVE DONE SOMETHING AS PECULIAR AS THIS. WHEN I WAS FINALLY ABLE TO AFFORD AN AUTOMOBILE THAT WAS RELIABLE AND ACTUALLY STARTED EVERY TIME I WANTED IT TO, I PURCHASED A BRAND NEW CHEVROLET. AND THEN I DID SOMETHING VERY SIGNIFICANT. I PURCHASED, FROM THE DEALER, A SET OF CLEAR PLASTIC SEAT COVERS. FOR FOUR OR FIVE YEARS WE SAT ON CLEAR PLASTIC AND WHEN I TRADED THE CAR IN, THE ORIGINAL FABRIC SEATS WERE

ABSOLUTELY AS PERFECT AS THE DAY I BOUGHT IT. I HAD NEVER ONCE ENJOYED THE ACTUAL SEATS. FURTHERMORE, I FELT GOOD ABOUT MY ACCOMPLISHMENT.

IN HIS POPULAR BOOK THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE, STEVEN COVEY TELLS ABOUT THE MAN WHO ASKED ANOTHER, ON THE DEATH OF A MUTUAL FRIEND, "HOW MUCH DID HE LEAVE?" HIS FRIEND RESPONDED, "HE LEFT IT ALL." [. 99]

AND LEONARD SWEET, IN HIS WITTY COMMENTARY ON THIS STORY SAYS THAT JESUS, IN TELLING THE YOUNG MAN TO SELL AND GIVE IT ALL, IS MERELY SPEEDING UP THE INEVITABLE.

YOU AND I REALLY DON'T OWN ANYTHING WE CANNOT DO WITHOUT. IN FACT, THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH WE ARE IN BONDAGE TO ANYTHING WE CANNOT GIVE AWAY. THAT IS WHAT JESUS SAW WHEN HE LOOKED AT THE EARNEST YOUNG MAN, AND THAT, I BELIEVE, IS THE PLACE WHERE THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST INTERSECTS MOST POWERFULLY WITH YOUR LIFE AND MINE.

IT MAY SEEM THAT WHAT INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION IS ABOUT MOSTLY IS ASKING FOR MONEY. AND, INDEED, WE DO. BUT TO THE DEGREE THAT WE ASK OR GIVE, OUT OF A SENSE OF OBLIGATION, OR WORSE, GUILT, OR WORST OF ALL, A SENSE THAT IF WE GIVE GOD WILL BE PLEASED WITH US, WE ARE MISSING THE POINT ALTOGETHER. ~~THIS~~

CHURCH NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT. IF YOU'RE VISITING THIS MORNING AND A MEMBER OF ANOTHER CHURCH, THAT CHURCH NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT. IF YOU ARE A MEMBER OF NO CHURCH, YOU OUGHT TO BE SUPPORTING WHOEVER IS NEAREST TO YOU AND IS PROVIDING THE COMPASSIONATE AND HELPFUL SERVICES TO NEEDY PEOPLE WHICH MAKES LIFE MORE HUMAN.

BUT ~~NONE OF THAT IS THE POINT, FINALLY.~~ THE POINT OF ALL THIS IS WHAT THAT YOUNG MAN WAS LOOKING FOR -- ETERNAL LIFE: LIFE NOW, WITH THE DEPTH AND MEANING AND FULLNESS OF ETERNITY ABOUT IT.

THAT'S WHAT JESUS CHRIST CAME TO GIVE. IT IS A GIFT. YOU RECEIVE IT BY

OPENING YOUR HANDS AND ASKING FOR IT. IT IS YOURS AS YOU RELEASE YOUR GRIP ON WHATEVER IT IS YOU ARE CLASPING SO TIGHTLY AND ALLOW GOD'S LOVE, GOD'S FORGIVENESS, GOD'S AMAZING GRACE TO FILL YOU.

YOU KNOW, FROM CHILDHOOD YOU AND I HAVE BEEN TAUGHT TO CLASP OUR HANDS TIGHTLY IN PRAYER -- "CLOSE YOUR EYES, BOW YOUR HEAD, FOLD YOUR HANDS." AND THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THAT POSTURE THAT REFLECTS OUR MIND SET: CLOSED OFF FROM THE WORLD, HANDS NOT TOUCHING ANYTHING TO DISTRACT; HEAD LOWERED FROM THE LEVEL OF NORMAL INTERCOURSE WITH LIFE, A KIND OF PERSONAL SPIRITUAL CLOSET. THERE IS A MUCH OLDER CUSTOM, I

clenched

HAVE LEARNED, AND THAT IS TO BE IN A RECEPTIVE POSTURE AS YOU PRAY; EYES OPEN PERHAPS HEAD UP, AND MOST OF ALL, HANDS OPEN. SOME PEOPLE EVEN LIFE THEIR HANDS IN A POSTURE OF RECEIVING AS THEY PRAY ... MOST OF US CAN'T BRING OURSELVES TO DO THAT. BUT WON'T YOU QUIETLY, SIMPLY, RELAX THE MUSCLES IN YOUR HANDS AND LET THEM BE OPEN, PALMS SLIGHTLY UP -- LET GO OF WHATEVER YOU ARE SQUEEZING, HOLDING SO TIGHTLY, AND BE READY TO RECEIVE.

THE PROMISE, WHICH JESUS MADE TO HIS PERPLEXED FRIENDS, IS THAT THOUGH THE DEMAND TO GIVE IT ALL AWAY IS IMPOSSIBLE, WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE

POSSIBLE, A LITTLE MORE SO, I THINK, WHEN OUR HANDS ARE OPEN.

* * * * *

GREAT GOD OF LOVE, FOR ALL YOUR GIFTS, WE THANK YOU. FOR OUR RESOURCES, BE THEY GREAT OR MODEST, FOR THE LOVE OF FRIENDS AND FAMILIES, FOR THE COMMON GIFTS OF BEAUTY AND KINDNESS AND AFFECTION, WE THANK YOU. TEACH US TO OPEN OUR HANDS, TO RELEASE OUR GRIP, AND TO BE RECEPTIVE TO THE LOVE YOU HAVE FOR US, IN JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

AMEN.

PRIORITIES. ("YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE")

... "I'M THINKING IT OVER."

BUT WHEN THE TOPIC COMES UP IN A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT WE HEAD FOR THE NEAREST EUPHEMISM. BOB LYNN SAYS CHURCHES DEVELOP A CULTURE OF GIVING WHICH OPERATES OFTEN BY MYTHS.

MYTH NUMBER ONE -- MONEY IS ABOUT MATERIALISM. RELIGION IS ABOUT SPIRITUALITY. WRONG. MONEY IS ABOUT HEART AND SPIRIT.

MYTH NUMBER TWO -- THE CHURCH DOESN'T NEED MONEY, IN FACT, WOULD DO BETTER WITHOUT IT. WRONG. THE CHURCH IS

Money / Value

ALWAYS ONE BUDGET YEAR AWAY FROM EXTINCTION. THE CHURCH NEEDS MONEY -- NOT ONLY TO PAY BILLS IT INCURS DOING ITS JOB: SALARIES, INSURANCE, CRIBS FOR DAY CARE, BOOKS, MUSIC, PIANO TUNING, MEAL VOUCHERS FOR HUNGRY PEOPLE ... BUT PRECISELY BECAUSE WE ARE IN THE SPIRIT AND SOUL BUSINESS, AND WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE.

YOU HAVE SOME LOCAL MYTHS, I'M SURE. "YOU DON'T NEED MONEY, FEW WEALTHY PEOPLE.

Beautiful Bldg — few wealthy who pay all

MONEY IS PERSONAL. WHAT WE DO WITH IT IS WHERE OUR HEART IS.

FPC reputation as old wealthy ch w/ big endowment

each church has myths — may be simple misinformed about budget — missi

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